

Coast Guard Arctic Strategy Rollout
Remarks of the Commandant
May 21, 2013
Center for Strategic and International Studies

Good morning.

I am very proud to be here today to announce the release of the United States Coast Guard Arctic Strategy.

I would like to thank the Center for Strategic and International Studies for hosting us today as part of its Strategy Forum. Thanks to Heather Conley for her strong advocacy for a national Arctic strategy and thoughtful public policy solutions in the Arctic. I look forward to the discussion and your questions today.

Thanks also to Secretary Napolitano for her leadership, and to Alice Hill, the Senior Counsel to the Secretary, and a champion for the completion and implementation of the Coast Guard Arctic Strategy within the broader missions of the Department of Homeland Security.

I welcome fellow members of the Executive branch agencies and Congressional staffs. I'd also like to welcome Dr. Kelly Falkner from the National Science Foundation.

From Alaska, Mayor Charlotte Brower and the delegation from the North Slope Borough.

Senator Lyman Hoffman from the Alaska Legislature, and others from Alaska.

I welcome representatives from the international community: Canada, Norway, Finland, Denmark and the European Union. Thank you for being here today.

I believe that the greatness of a nation can be measured by its commitment to providing mariners safe and secure approaches to its shores. And that a nation's prosperity is proportionate to how well it ensures the safe, secure and efficient movement of trade and commerce to and from its shores. And that a great nation will also ensure the environmental protection of the sea.

Wherever human activity thrives, government has a responsibility to uphold the rule of law, ensure the safety and security of its people, and ensure environmentally responsible maritime activity. We call this “maritime governance” and it is an essential component of homeland security and the national security of the United States.

For over two hundred years our Coast Guard has provided maritime governance by ensuring maritime safety, security and stewardship for the Nation.

We protect those on the sea.
We protect America from threats delivered by sea.
And we protect the sea itself

Safety ... Security ... Stewardship

As a maritime nation, the United States relies on the sea for our prosperity, trade, transportation, and security.

We are also an Arctic nation. And the Arctic region is the emerging maritime frontier, vital to our national interests, economy and security.

The Arctic Ocean is rapidly changing from a solid expanse of inaccessible ice fields into a growing navigable sea, attracting increased human activity and unlocking access to vast economic potential and energy resources.

The economic promise of oil and gas production in the Arctic is increasingly attractive as the supply of energy from traditional sources will struggle to meet demand. In the past four years we’ve seen well over a 100% increase in traffic through the Bering Strait, and one million tons of cargo was shipped through the region last year. In addition, more than 50% of America’s fish stock comes from the Exclusive Economic Zone off the coast of Alaska.

This change from “hard water” to “soft water”, growing economic interests and energy demands, and increasing use of the seas for maritime activities by commercial, native, and recreational users demands a persistent, capable U.S. Coast Guard presence in the Arctic region.

Our mandate to ensure maritime safety, security and stewardship applies in the Arctic just as it applies in the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, the Gulf of Mexico, or the Caribbean Sea.

Coast Guard operations in the Arctic region are not new. Nearly 150 years ago, we were the federal presence in the “District of Alaska,” administering justice, settling disputes, providing medical care, enforcing sovereignty, and rescuing people in distress. Our recorded history is filled with passages of Coast Guardsmen who braved the sea and ice in sailing ships and early steam ships to rescue mariners, prevent illegal poaching, and explore the great North. World War II ushered in the service’s first icebreakers. In 1957, three Coast Guard cutters made headlines by becoming the first American vessels to circumnavigate the North American continent through the Northwest Passage.

Although we have lived and served in southern Alaska for most of the Coast Guard’s existence, our access to and operations in northern Alaska on the North Slope have been only temporary and occasional, with no permanent infrastructure or operating forces along the Beaufort or Chukchi seas. There are no deepwater ports there.

However, the acceleration of human activity in the Arctic region, the opening of the seas, and the inevitable increase in maritime activity mean increased risk of maritime accidents, including those involving cruise ships; oil spills; illegal fishing and harvesting of other natural resources from U.S. waters; and a host of other threats to our safety, security or sovereignty. Those growing risks—inevitable with growth of human activity—demand the Coast Guard’s attention and commitment to meet our responsibilities to the nation.

Earlier this month the President issued a national strategy for the Arctic, setting the vision and direction for the nation and committing to integrate the work of Federal departments and agencies with activities already underway at the state, local and tribal levels.

I am proud that the United States Coast Guard, under the leadership of the Secretary of Homeland Security, is the first to roll out a strategy that furthers the Lines of Effort and Guiding Principles contained in the National Arctic Strategy. The President stated that the goal of the National Strategy is to position the United States to meet the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead in the Arctic. The Coast Guard Arctic Strategy focuses our Service efforts to achieve that goal.

This document contains three strategic objectives that will guide Coast Guard efforts in the Arctic over the next ten years.

They are:

1. Improving Awareness
2. Modernizing Governance
3. Broadening Partnerships

Our first strategic objective is simply to better understand the Arctic operating environment, the increase in activity, and the risks it presents. This understanding will inform and enable effective Coast Guard presence to identify and address risks as early as possible. In much of the Arctic, we simply don't know what is occurring. We need improved collection, analysis and sharing of maritime information.

We cannot do this alone. It requires a collaborative network of domestic and international partners, drawing upon their cumulative authorities, capabilities and experience.

And awareness requires presence...persistent presence of the Coast Guard to be able to rapidly detect, prevent and respond to maritime threats and hazards.

Persistent presence is a challenge given the distances involved and the often hostile environment. There is a lack of shore infrastructure in the remote reaches of the Arctic, and the expense of building permanent infrastructure and the uncertainty of dynamic and evolving requirements have demanded that the Coast Guard rely on mobile offshore infrastructure to meet demands. We have tested and proven that approach over the past several years, and that will be our approach for the coming decade.

Last summer, we completed Arctic Shield 2012, a nine-month interagency operation consisting of outreach, operations, and assessment of capabilities, including the deployment of a National Security Cutter and two of our ocean going, ice capable buoy tenders. We also surged two helicopters to Barrow, 800 miles from Kodiak and 300 miles above the Arctic Circle. The National Security Cutter BERTHOLF provided us with an effective presence and "off-shore infrastructure" in the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas during industry exploratory drilling. These National Security Cutters provide floating maritime governance, in the tradition of cutters that have served in Alaska for over a century and a half. They carry the supplies needed to provide a sustained presence in ice-free waters.

They can carry and launch small boats and helicopters to conduct the full range of Coast Guard missions. And they provide a robust suite of communications and intelligence capabilities for effective command and control of operations. The National Security Cutter WAESCHE will be patrolling the Arctic waters this summer, providing effective Coast Guard presence during the seasonal period of heightened maritime activity in the ice-free waters.

Also, the Nation now has two operational icebreakers to ensure U.S. access to ice-bound waters: HEALY, our medium icebreaker, and POLAR STAR, the world's most powerful non-nuclear heavy icebreaker, which just returned to active service and is preparing for operations later this year. And with the support of the Secretary and the Administration, we have begun the process of developing and analyzing the requirements to design and build the next generation of heavy icebreaker over the next decade.

For the foreseeable future, the Coast Guard's priority is to employ mobile infrastructure and seasonal presence of cutters, boats and aircraft – supplemented by the existing shore-side infrastructure – to provide the flexible and adaptable capability needed for Arctic operations.

Our second strategic objective is to modernize governance in the Arctic.

We will do this by:

- Leading within the interagency to strengthen international legal regimes;
- Safeguarding the marine environment;
- Preserving living marine resources; and
- Protecting U.S. sovereignty and sovereign rights.

A legally certain and predictable set of rights and obligations to address activity in the Arctic is paramount. And the United States must be part of such a legal regime to protect and advance our security, economic and environmental interests.

Unlike Antarctica, the Arctic is governed by multiple legal regimes and forums. Some are evolving and dynamic, and others—such as the Law of the Sea Convention – the United States is not a party to. And as you well know, we are the only Arctic Nation that has yet to accede to the Law of the Sea Treaty.

In order to exercise leadership, improve our ability to influence outcomes, and effectively interact with other Arctic Nations, we urgently need the Senate to approve U.S. accession to the treaty.

For the past several years there has been a race by countries other than the United States to file internationally recognized claims on the maritime regions and sea beds of the Arctic. Alaska has more than 1000 miles of coastline above the Arctic Circle on the Beaufort and Chukchi seas. Our territorial waters extend 12 nautical miles from the coast, and the exclusive economic zone extends to 200 nautical miles from shore just as along the rest of the United States coastline. So along the North Slope, that's more than 200,000 square miles of Arctic water over which the Coast Guard has jurisdiction.

Below the surface, the United States also may assert sovereign rights over natural resources on its continental shelf out to 200 nautical miles. However, with accession to the Law of the Sea Convention, the United States has the potential to exercise additional sovereign rights over resources on an extended outer continental shelf, which might reach as far as 600 nautical miles into the Arctic from the Alaska coast.

While the United States stands by, other nations are moving ahead in perfecting rights over resources on an extended continental shelf. Russia, Canada, Denmark (through Greenland), and Norway—also Arctic nations—have filed extended continental shelf claims under the Law of the Sea Convention that would give them exclusive rights to oil and gas resources on this shelf. They are making their case publicly in the media, and in construction of vessels to patrol these waters. Even China, which has no land mass connectivity with the Arctic Ocean, has raised interest by conducting research in the region. The United States should accede to the Law of the Sea Convention without delay to protect our national security interests: sovereignty, environment, economy, and energy

Other international legal regimes governing the Arctic are remarkably dynamic and evolving.

Just last week in Sweden, the Arctic Council agreed to expand its membership beyond the eight original Arctic nations to include six new observer states: China, India, Italy, Japan, Singapore and South Korea. The admission and participation of these non-Arctic nations in the Council demonstrates a clear recognition of the importance of the Arctic to global security and prosperity, and the importance of broader inclusion to develop binding international regimes and standards there.

The Arctic Council adopted a resolution to prepare and coordinate a response to potential spills that could result from increased oil and gas exploration. This joins the earlier agreement by Council members to coordinate search and rescue operations. Both agreements focus on common risks and interests of member states, and provide the foundation for future coordination on other areas. Canada just assumed the Chairmanship of the Arctic Council, and the United States will succeed them in 2015. And we are building on the strength of existing relationships with Canada, Russia, and within the North Pacific and North Atlantic Coast Guard Forums.

The Coast Guard leads the U.S. delegation to the International Maritime Organization, the recognized body for administering international standards and rules governing safety of life at sea, maritime environmental protection, maritime security, and standards for competency of mariners. The IMO continues development of a Polar Code to govern vessel operations, and the Coast Guard is working with the Department of State and other Federal agencies on that effort.

Together, this evolving and diverse mosaic of international legal regimes demand the United States remain an active leader and participant to ensure our national interests.

Further, the Coast Guard will safeguard the marine environment and preserve living marine resources in the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone through persistent Coast Guard operational presence. We will seek to prevent dangerous or illicit maritime activities through regulation, inspections and enforcement of standards. If undesirable or unlawful maritime events do occur—whether deliberate or accidental—we will rapidly and effectively respond.

Protecting U.S. sovereignty requires maritime governance. We cannot exercise governance without effective operational presence.

Our third strategic objective is to broaden partnerships.

We will do this by:

- Developing and promoting the Coast Guard as an expert and experienced resource for partners;
- Leverage domestic and international partnerships as force multipliers; and
- Support a national approach for Arctic planning.

While the Coast Guard's Arctic Strategy is focused on our role in the region, the Arctic is not just a Coast Guard issue. It is a national issue requiring a whole of government approach: Federal, state, local and tribal governments. . . . and a whole of nation approach: non-governmental organizations, industry, academia.

Today there are centers of experience and pockets of expertise among these groups that we must use to build a network of partners. That is essential to achieving the unity of effort necessary to carry out the U.S. National Strategy on the Arctic.

Within the Department of Homeland Security, we are taking a One DHS approach for operations in the region among our components to secure the border, prevent terrorism and lead adaptation to climate change. We are working with the Department of Interior, Department of Defense and other Federal agencies.

But we must rely in particular on leadership outside of the Federal government, especially the native Alaskan tribal governments and peoples, and the State of Alaska. And we must work closely with the private sector, including the maritime industry that we are responsible for governing.

Again, this requires a whole of nation approach in planning and activities.

I mentioned before that in 1957 three Coast Guard cutters were the first U.S. ships to traverse the Northwest Passage. Why? Because they were supporting the creation of the Distant Early Warning system or DEW line. There was a national imperative for our presence in the Arctic then. The United States recognized that imperative and responded with action to ensure our national interests.

That national imperative in the Arctic is upon us again, but now it is different...driven by an emerging maritime frontier and the promise of opportunity and prosperity... as well as risk. We all are called to action to meet that imperative.

The Coast Guard is working to do our part. For almost 223 years, we have overseen the safety, security, and stewardship of our nation's waters. Our challenge today is to ensure we are prepared with a Coast Guard capable and ready to meet our responsibilities in the Arctic. We need to react. It's time to adapt.